

SENATE RECORD VOTE ANALYSIS

104th Congress
2nd Session

Vote No. 172

June 26, 1996, 1:41 p.m.
Page S-6946 Temp. Record

DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION/\$11.5 Billion FY 1997 Cut (President's Request)

SUBJECT: National Defense Authorization Act for fiscal year 1997 . . . S. 1745. Wellstone amendment No. 4266.

ACTION: AMENDMENT REJECTED, 34-65

SYNOPSIS: As reported, S. 1745, the National Defense Authorization Act for fiscal year 1997, will authorize a total of \$267.3 billion in budget authority for national defense programs (the President requested \$254.3 billion). In real terms, this bill will authorize \$5.6 billion less, and the President requested \$18.6 billion less, than was provided in fiscal year (FY) 1996.

The Wellstone amendment would reduce the total amount authorized for fiscal year (FY) 1997 by \$12.9 billion, to the President's requested level of \$254.3 billion. The amendment would not make any specific authorization reductions; the bill's specific authorizations would still total \$12.9 billion more than this amendment would allow to be authorized in total. Instead of making specific reductions, the Wellstone amendment would order the Secretary of Defense to make specific reductions in authorized funding levels, and to make those reductions "so as not to jeopardize the military readiness of the Armed Forces or the quality of life of Armed Forces personnel." Finally, the amendment states that the \$12.9 billion authorization reduction would be "applied to reduce the budget deficit," though it would provide no means of enforcing that statement (such as by reducing the spending caps).

Those favoring the amendment contended:

At the request of the Republican leadership, this bill contains a whopping \$13 billion more in authorizations than President Clinton requested. The President's request was based on the advice of the Secretary of Defense and the Joint Chiefs of Staff. That money is mostly for wasteful porkbarrel weapon systems that will not increase our country's security one iota. The United States already spends a huge amount on defense, while numerous social service needs are underfunded. The Wellstone amendment would cut defense spending down to the level that the Pentagon believes is advisable. Instead of spending the savings on social welfare programs, though, the amendment would use them to reduce the deficit. Our Republican colleagues who are constantly talking about the need to balance the budget should seize this chance to cut the deficit by \$13 billion.

(See other side)

YEAS (34)			NAYS (65)			NOT VOTING (1)	
Republicans (4 or 8%)	Democrats (30 or 65%)		Republicans (49 or 92%)	Democrats (16 or 35%)		Republicans (0)	Democrats (1)
Brown	Baucus	Kohl	Abraham	Hutchison	Akaka		Bumpers- ²
Grassley	Biden	Lautenberg	Ashcroft	Inhofe	Breaux		
Hatfield	Bingaman	Leahy	Bennett	Kassebaum	Byrd		
Jeffords	Boxer	Levin	Bond	Kempthorne	Dodd		
	Bradley	Mikulski	Burns	Kyl	Exon		
	Bryan	Moseley-Braun	Campbell	Lott	Feinstein		
	Conrad	Murray	Chafee	Lugar	Ford		
	Daschle	Pell	Coats	Mack	Heflin		
	Dorgan	Pryor	Cochran	McCain	Hollings		
	Feingold	Reid	Cohen	McConnell	Inouye		
	Glenn	Rockefeller	Coverdell	Murkowski	Johnston		
	Graham	Sarbanes	Craig	Nickles	Kerrey		
	Harkin	Simon	D'Amato	Pressler	Lieberman		
	Kennedy	Wellstone	DeWine	Roth	Moynihan		
	Kerry	Wyden	Domenici	Santorum	Nunn		
			Faircloth	Shelby	Robb		
			Frahm	Simpson			
			Frist	Smith			
			Gorton	Snowe			
			Gramm	Specter			
			Grams	Stevens			
			Gregg	Thomas			
			Hatch	Thompson			
			Helms	Thurmond			
				Warner			
						EXPLANATION OF ABSENCE:	
						1—Official Business	
						2—Necessarily Absent	
						3—Illness	
						4—Other	
						SYMBOLS:	
						AY—Announced Yea	
						AN—Announced Nay	
						PY—Paired Yea	
						PN—Paired Nay	

Compiled and written by the staff of the Republican Policy Committee—Larry E. Craig, Chairman

The Defense Department, in the President's budget, indicated that only \$254 billion would be needed to meet the Nation's defense needs in FY 1997. Ordinarily, departments tend to overstate how much money they need, and Congress looks at ways to economize. In this case, though, our Republican colleagues have said that the military planners at the Department of Defense do not know what they are talking about--they need to spend an extra \$13 billion, mostly for defense procurement systems. Some of those systems the Department of Defense says it will want in a few years from now; others are not even in the Department's long-term plans. Our opinion is that many of those systems are porkbarrel spending projects that were selected on the basis of whose State they would be built in rather than on any basis of merit.

The Wellstone amendment would shave the overall spending back to the President's level, but it would leave the individual decisions on what to cut up to the Defense Department. Hopefully, the Department would institute some of the proposals that have been made for it to root out waste, fraud, and abuse. By poetic coincidence, the Defense Department informs us that this year its accounting practices are so faulty that it cannot account for \$13 billion. Maybe that money was well spent; maybe not--we will never know, because the Department says that it would cost it more than that amount to figure out where the money went.

Even with the Wellstone amendment, the United States will still be spending \$254 billion on defense. Our allies will spend about the same amount. Against all this spending, all of the United States potential adversaries put together will spend only \$140 billion. The United States obviously is spending an adequate amount on defense.

It just as obviously is not spending enough on education, the environment, medical assistance, and numerous other social welfare programs. What exactly should be our definition of defense? Education is a defense against prejudice, ignorance, despair, bitterness, anger, and cynicism. We should spend a lot more money defending against these internal dangers instead of addressing external dangers so generously. Perhaps it is time for the United States to reassess its external defense strategies. Maybe it is not necessary to have a military force capable of winning two regional conflicts against lesser powers at the same time. Maybe we should only have a force strong enough to beat one third-world dictator at a time, because if we cut our military by that amount we will have much more money to spend on domestic programs.

Though our preference certainly would be to spend the money on crying social welfare needs, in this amendment we have said that the savings from cutting the authorization for defense would be used to reduce the deficit. Our Republican colleagues are always talking about how they want to cut spending in order to reduce the deficit. They have presented one proposal after another, and all of those proposals have cut domestic discretionary spending. The Wellstone amendment would give them a new option: cut defense to cut the deficit. Our colleagues are willing to cut to the bone on education, welfare, the environment, and all other domestic discretionary spending in order to balance the budget. We hope that in this case they will vote for the Wellstone amendment, thereby showing that they are willing to cut at least the fat from defense spending in order to reduce the deficit.

Those opposing the amendment contended:

The linchpin of our colleagues' argument in favor of the Wellstone amendment to adopt the President's funding level is that the Secretary of Defense and the Joint Chiefs of Staff have stated their support for the President's budget. This argument is disappointing. No Senator actually believes for one second that those military leaders support the Clinton defense budget. Certainly it may play well with some voters who are always willing to believe that too much is spent on defense, but as a matter of honest analysis all Senators know that every real military planner from the Joint Chiefs on down believes that President Clinton's budget is underfunded. One would hope that if a Senator had a philosophical objection to the proposed level of defense spending in this bill then that Senator would make arguments based on that objection. Unfortunately, those objections have only been raised as secondary considerations when Senators have talked about all the things on which they would rather spend the money (though, to make the amendment more palatable to Republican Senators, the "savings" would supposedly be used to reduce the deficit instead of spent).

Nevertheless, our colleagues have made this argument, and we will answer it in two parts. First, Defense Department experts do not believe that the President's proposed budget is anywhere close to the amount that is necessary to protect the national security interests of the United States, and they have all said so repeatedly. Second, even if the Defense Department supported the President's inadequate funding level, that would by no means preclude Congress from exercising its own judgment. On the first point, we have 17 pages of quotes from Defense Department officials, including General Shalikashvili, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, every member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, every Service Chief, and the Secretary of Defense that say that the United States is seriously underfunding new procurement. According to General Shalikashvili, the United States should be spending \$60 billion per year on new weaponry, but President Clinton in this budget has asked for only \$38 billion. Military expert after military expert has warned that the United States for the past several years has been seriously underfunding procurement accounts, and as a result our Armed Services are becoming obsolete. Senators may disingenuously demure that the Defense Department has backed the Clinton budget, but the Defense Department is no different than any other Federal department--the budget is set by the President, and every Department supports the numbers that the President wants. The Defense Department gave the required rubberstamp to the Clinton budget, but do our colleagues really expect us to believe that Defense Department experts support a low level of funding that they unanimously have stated harms national security? The United States has been coasting on the defense buildup of the 1980s for nearly 10 years. It cannot coast forever--the eventual price will be measured in lost American lives when we go to war with obsolete

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equipment.

Some Senators like to suggest that we can simply cut other defense spending to pay for procurement. Let us take a look at the numbers. Two-thirds of all defense spending is for personnel costs. Do our colleagues want to cut those costs further? Virtually all of President Clinton's "reinventing" Government initiative has been to get rid of civilian and enlisted military personnel. Over the last 5 years, civilian military personnel have been cut by nearly 20 percent. Over the past 10 years, active duty end strengths have been cut 688,000. These cuts have not led to more funding for the remaining soldiers. Our colleagues blithely assert that their \$13 billion cut would be made so as not to harm the quality of life for military personnel. Are they aware that fully 60 percent of military housing is listed as substandard by the Department of Defense, which already has standards that are well below civilian housing standards? At the current rate of renovation it would take 30 years to correct this problem, by which time current housing that is up to par would be substandard. Further, our military forces are not exactly overpaid. In fact, thousands of personnel who are ready to put their lives on the line in defense of this Nation are paid so poorly that they are on food stamps.

Our colleagues' amendment also states that readiness would not be affected by their cut. It should state that it would not be affected further than it already has been by the Clinton cuts of the past few years. President Clinton has sent our troops around the world at operating tempos that are three to four times higher than they ever were in the Cold War. This constant deployment rate has cut down on maintenance and training, and has greatly weakened morale. How do our colleagues propose to increase readiness with their inadequate funding level? Our assumption is that they want the cuts to fall in procurement spending, because they have derided the additional procurement funding in this bill as "pork." Of course, procurement cuts now destroy future readiness because they result in our future forces being armed with obsolete equipment.

Interestingly, our colleagues have chosen not to take the heat for proposing specific defense cuts. They have made fine, nebulous claims that there is wasteful spending, but they have not said what exactly that spending is. Instead, they have told the Defense Department to do Congress' job for it by making authorization cuts wherever it pleases. We note that with this formulation Members will be able to claim both that they were for cutting "wasteful" defense spending, and that they were against the specific cuts that the Defense Department ended up making because those cuts were not of "wasteful" programs.

This point brings us to our second argument, which is that Congress is not supposed to be a rubberstamp for any department, including the Defense Department. We were elected to decide policy, not the generals. Our liberal colleagues understand this fact when discussing social welfare spending. In years past, when we have had Republican Administrations and social welfare agencies have reflected the policies of those Administrations, our liberal friends have argued determinedly for greater spending than requested by those agencies. They did not come to the floor and say that the Department of Housing and Urban Development, for example, requested less funding, and Congress should simply approve that funding because those agency bureaucrats were experts. On the contrary, they demanded greater spending. Their demands were appropriate. They were exercising the judgment that they were elected to exercise. Similarly, even if in this case Defense officials really supported the President's inadequate funding request, we would still demand greater funding. We are convinced that our military is sliding into obsolescence from a refusal to modernize, and we are determined to stop this slide. We have made such judgment calls in the past, such as when we insisted on improving sealift capabilities despite Pentagon opposition (Pentagon analysts now concede that we were correct), and we will continue to do so in the future.

In a final note, we thank our colleagues for recognizing that we on the Republican side of the aisle have been greatly concerned with reducing the deficit. They seem puzzled that given this fact, we are not willing to support their amendment. By way of explanation, we note that from FY 1990 to FY 2002, defense spending will decline 34 percent, while nondefense discretionary spending will rise by 12.5 percent and mandatory spending will rise by 34.2 percent. The problem is not defense spending, so cutting defense spending will not solve the problem.

If our colleagues are willing to have the United States retreat from being the leader of the free world, and if they think that it is safe for it to do so, then they should come out and say it. They should not make false arguments that it is possible to be the leader of the free world on the President's inadequate defense funding proposal. For our part, we are determined to stop a further deterioration of our Armed Forces, so we emphatically urge the rejection of the Wellstone amendment.